

situation demands, the family as a group works and plans together around such areas as where and how vacation time is to be spent, whether money should be used for a new television set or for rumpus room furniture.

It may, at times, seem that the "little things" in everyday family living are relatively unimportant. We see that unless nations learn to work together, they will perish. We know that labor and management must cooperate lest there be continued industrial strife. Inter-professional jealousies and rivalries plague us. Racial, religious and social prejudice make it

clear that we still have far to go before we can truly call ourselves brothers.

Yet, in a very profound sense, the way we have learned or failed to learn to work together in the family has a bearing on our ability to work together in the larger arenas of human interaction. The significance of the early-established patterns cannot lightly be pushed aside. As individuals, we bring to our work and our play, to the council table and to our contacts with diverse groups, patterns of response that have come out of such simple experiences as have been all too briefly considered here.



MAURICE D. BEMENT

Working Together in the COMMUNITY

How can citizens show most effectively their genuine concern with the status of their schools? Several approaches to organization of citizens councils and committees are suggested in this article.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION in school affairs is fashionable today. Sometimes it seems as if everyone is either talking or writing about it. The school system without a citizens committee today is as dated as milady's last year's hat. Too often, however, neither the laymen participants nor the educational leaders have a clear idea of just what citizen-school cooperation can accomplish or how they can best go about it.

It is possible to set up endless lists of "dos" and "don'ts" for citizens and schoolmen working in local citizens committees, but these lists have only limited utility. The person who is particularly adept at losing friends and alienating people is less likely to take such admonitions to heart than is the person who has already accepted them. It is more effective to start with first principles, to think through *why* citizens should participate in school af-

fairs, and what the objectives of school-community cooperation should be. A thorough understanding of these bases for cooperation will lead much more surely to constructive action.

Why Bother To Work Together?

It may seem impossible that any citizen or schoolman could have lived through the past decade and not have come to understand why cooperation between school and community is needed. They have been told often enough, and many horrible examples of non-cooperation have been plain for all to see. Nevertheless, a brief recapitulation might be helpful. The "why" often helps to clarify the "how."

We must, first, remember that the schools are public institutions serving the community. Decisions affecting them are matters of broad public policy and, to be effective, such decisions must have the support of the whole community. This is true whether the issue is a classroom shortage, how to finance current operations, or deciding what should be taught in our schools. It is even true when the problem is that of finding enough good teachers. Children, when choosing a career, reflect the attitude of their teachers, their parents and other adults. No community can expect more than a handful of its children to be attracted to teaching if its attitude is negative or merely passive about its schools.

There are two major alternatives to community-wide solution of school questions. One is not to solve them at all. The other is for a small group of interested—sometimes self-interested—laymen and schoolmen to impose a

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solution on an apathetic public. This alternative is often attractive. When it works, it wastes little time or effort and doesn't go asking for trouble.

The only trouble with this second alternative is that it is dangerous. It is dangerous as is any undemocratic procedure. It fosters an uninformed community. People who are ignorant of school affairs, who feel that they have no stake in the schools, are susceptible to the demagogue, the self-interested, the selfish.

The basic reason for working together, then, is to create a well-informed public, a community that knows and cares about its schools. It is, in the democratic tradition, to make sure that the schools reflect directly a consensus of the best thinking in each community.

Who Works Together?

Individuals, working independently, have made many contributions to their schools. However, a dozen—or 100—individuals, working separately can never accomplish as much as the same number could working together. Therefore, organization is important.

Many organizations have worked successfully in school affairs. The PTA, for instance, is continuing an historic contribution to the welfare of the public schools. Many civic and fraternal organizations have, through their education committees, made significant contributions. And in recent years citizens committees or councils, established ex-

clusively for the purpose of studying and helping to resolve school issues, have gained wide popularity. It is perhaps the latter that are becoming the most typical means for community-wide study of school problems.

Citizens committees may be formed in any of several ways, but there are two main methods. These have been used independently and in various combinations. Schoolmen, quite naturally, tend to prefer a committee appointed by the superintendent or school board. They have in some instances, by the same token, tended to distrust the independent committee formed spontaneously by interested citizens. Each method has its advantages and its limitations.

Many appointed committees have been strikingly effective in working on school issues. They are likely to start out with the full confidence and cooperation of school authorities and often enjoy a sort of semi-official status which sometimes helps them more easily to gain the confidence of the community. When the members are carefully selected, they can bring to bear on school problems the varied talents and intelligence in the community. However, appointed committees suffer from certain limitations imposed by the advantages they enjoy. School authorities, for instance, often prefer to appoint *ad hoc* committees designed to help meet a specific crisis rather than continuing committees to study continuing school problems. Even when members are chosen to represent the varied facets of the community, they are likely to share a common educational point of view—to be sympathetic to the point of view of

the school administration that appointed them—to mirror official policy. They are less inclined to exercise independence in thought and judgment. It is more difficult for them to contribute fresh perspective to the consideration of school affairs—potentially one of the most important functions laymen can perform. By the same token, it is sometimes more difficult for such committees to gain the confidence of the whole community and therefore more difficult for them to act effectively as a media of communication between school and community. At worst, they become mere rubber stamps for the policies and point of view of the school authorities.

Independent, continuing committees, which may arise spontaneously out of citizens' concern for the welfare of their schools, often find it easier to select members who are more truly representative of the many points of view included in the community. Once such a committee has proved itself a responsible agency, anxious to cooperate with school authorities, but jealous of its independence of thought and action, it often gains the confidence of the community to a greater degree than would an appointed committee. Since the individual members are not beholden to school authorities for their appointment, it is easier for them to exercise independence of thought and judgment in approaching educational issues. They also have the advantage, more often, of long term operation which makes it possible for them to attack long range school problems more effectively. On the other hand, it is sometimes more difficult for such a committee to gain the confidence

and cooperation of the school authorities. And, because of the relative freedom they enjoy, it is necessary for them to exercise a greater degree of maturity and self-discipline. At best, independent citizens committees probably offer the greatest potential contribution for better schools. At worst, they can become irresponsible and destructive.

A combination of these two has often produced outstanding results. A committee, which is initiated either by the school authorities or by a group of citizens, and which is organized independently but has the full cooperation of the school authorities, may secure the advantages and avoid the liabilities of either of the two methods alone.

Committees initiated and organized in a variety of ways have been successful in working for better schools. By the same token, committees organized in similar fashion have been notable failures. No matter what the method employed, there are dangers involved. They are the same dangers inherent in democracy itself but the rewards, too, are the same. And the prerequisites for success are identical also: responsible citizens honestly dedicated to a common objective.

The "How" of Working Together

Before starting actual work, both laymen and schoolmen should know "who is responsible for what." The hierarchy of responsibility for the schools is clear, but easily forgotten. Citizens have the ultimate responsibility for the welfare of their schools. They delegate authority for determining school policy and managing school

affairs to the school board and the superintendent. Ultimate responsibility for the schools, however, cannot be delegated.

Therefore, when citizens take an active part in school affairs they must do so through or in cooperation with their legal representatives. This means that citizens may study, appraise, persuade and recommend. They cannot dictate school policy.

School authorities, on the other hand, must remember that they are the stewards of the community's schools. They are not free agents operating a vested interest. They are instruments for expressing the community will.

Remember To Put First Things First

Start with the facts. Until laymen have studied school affairs they have no rational basis for independent decision. They can only accept—or reject—what they are told by others. The first step is to collect all relevant information.

Then use the facts as a basis for discussion. Given the same body of facts, honest men may still differ about the conclusions that should be drawn. Frank and friendly discussion of differing points of view will broaden the perspective of each individual and prepare the way for compromise and agreement.

Not all members of the community will be directly involved in the fact finding process. Therefore wide publicity should be given to information as it is collected as well as to the different points of view concerning it. Only in this fashion can the whole community become informed.

Be Honest About Your Objective

Citizen participation in school affairs should lead to a better informed public and a clearer statement of the community will on educational issues. It will not resolve all differences of opinion—even the best cooperative effort will have difficulty convincing the lion and the lamb to lie down together. But it can provide a sound basis for broader understanding of the issues and for working agreement on specific problems.

Citizen participation cannot, however, be used successfully merely to promote a single point of view. Neither schoolmen nor citizens can afford to use pressure tactics if true cooperation and agreement are desired. A large part of educational policy and practice is based on demonstrable fact. Another, not inconsiderable, part of the schools' program is based on value judgments about which, rightly, there is difference of opinion both within and without the profession. Honest, informed and intelligent men will always differ on questions involving value judgments, and may differ on those involving facts.

These questions about which honest men differ appear in every area of school affairs. For instance, there may be a variety of conflicting opinions about the building of a new school, where it should be located, the area it should serve and the facilities it should include. Equally varied and conflicting points of view may play a part in de-

termining teachers' salary schedules, how the schools should be supported or what the curriculum should include. The community that knows all the facts, and is aware of the varied conclusions different people may reach on the basis of these facts, is better equipped to reach sound decisions than the community that is ignorant of much relevant information.

Have a Little Faith

Perhaps the most effective leavening agent for the mixture of personalities and motives, known as citizen participation, is a dash of faith. Schoolmen and laymen are often virtual strangers. It is easy to distrust and distort the unknown.

While getting started, before a basis for friendly respect has been established, laymen should remember that most schoolmen are trained, conscientious and responsible practitioners in a technical profession. Schoolmen should remember that the majority of citizens with whom they will be working are intelligent and responsible individuals as well. If each group will temporarily accept the integrity and intentions of the other on faith, this will clear the way for cooperation until a personal basis for continuing respect has been established. Such cooperation, contributing to effective school improvement, is being witnessed by an increasing number of communities. Given the right chance it can work in and for your community.



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